

MAY 2 1966

The CIA's Mission

Recent disclosures about the Central Intelligence Agency, including its use of Michigan State University as a cover for activities in Viet Nam, have caused a new surge of public concern. Once more, Senators and Representatives are talking about intensifying congressional surveillance over an agency that seems pretty much to run itself and write its own budget. Yet again, we are hearing charges that the CIA virtually operates foreign policy of its own, and has become almost an "invisible government."

If the CIA devoted itself to intelligence alone, there would be less cause for concern. Much as the international snooping of electronically gadgeted agents may bore or amuse us, our Government does need information, secret and otherwise, in great volume and of imaginative scope. The gathering of military and political intelligence is a legitimate function of modern government, and the CIA, despite some notable blunders of misinformation and misinterpretation, probably does this job as well as anybody.

The difficulty, as *The New York Times* notes in a detailed examination of CIA activities by its Washington staff members, which the *Post-Dispatch* begins publishing today, is that "information gathering often spills over at the scene of action into something else—subversion, counter-activity, sabotage, political and economic intervention and other kinds of 'dirty tricks.' Often the intelligence gatherer, by design or force of circumstance, becomes an activist in the affairs he was set to watch."

The results of such operations are now familiar. The CIA set the pattern of our involvement in Viet Nam by undertaking to establish the Diem government in 1954, and sustain it thereafter. It overthrew governments in Guatemala and Iran, planned an invasion of Cuba, conducted air attacks in The Congo, sought to subvert Sukarno in Indonesia, and engaged in similar exploits, great or small, around the world. All too often there has been justifiable suspicion that, though the CIA obtained nominal approval from higher authority for such operations, it controlled the critical decisions by controlling the information and creating the situation that confronted the President and his advisers.

Bringing the CIA under full control of responsible officials is vital, of course, but the deeper question is whether our national purposes are best served by engaging in the kind of arrogant, pervasive, immoral intervention in other people's affairs which the CIA has come to stand for.

Secretary Rusk, characteristically, says the CIA is engaged in a "back alley struggle" which, though rough and unpleasant, must be accepted as "part of the struggle for freedom." This view arises, we think, from a profound misreading of the nature of revolution. It is assumed that revolutions can be imposed from the top and from outside; and, assuming that this is what the Communists do, people like Mr. Rusk jump to the conclusion that "the free world" should do the same, even down to imitating the hoodlum tactics we attribute to "the other side."

Whatever the morals of such a philosophy, it ignores the facts of life and cannot in the long run succeed. We may have temporary success in trying to impose our standards on others by means of bribery, violence, fraud, subversion or sabotage, but in time we shall find that bought men do not stay bought, and that in the end people will insist upon controlling their own national lives. It is not the American mission to control other governments and conduct a world-wide counter-revolution. We only injure our own interests by behaving as if it were. Should our leaders once make up their minds firmly to that, they would face no difficulty in confining the CIA to its proper field of intelligence operations.